

Diachronic aspects of blocking: Economy, analogy, and the emergence of paradigm structure

Abstract.

The basic objectives of this paper are the following: First, it examines the workings of blocking effects in language acquisition and change. It is argued that grammaticalization processes, which give rise to (new) exponents of functional/inflectional heads, are shaped by blocking effects that operate during language acquisition and favor the use of more specified Vocabulary items over less specified Vocabulary items. Second, the paper discusses the relation between blocking and analogical changes, in which less distinctive forms win out over more specified exponents. It is argued that at least core cases of analogical change can be attributed to a preference for minimizing the number of features (or, Vocabulary items) mentioned in the lexicon. In this way, the two apparently conflicting forces actually work hand in hand during language acquisition, warranting that the acquisition process leads to an optimal paradigm and lexicon structure based on the evidence available to the learner.